

YORÙBÁ INTERROGATIVE PROVERBS

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Abstract

This study examines the forms and functions of Yorùbá interrogative proverbs. It posits that almost all interrogative proverbs in Yorùbá contain question words which appear in the sentence initial or sentence final. The study shows that Yorùbá interrogative proverbs have two basic forms: proverbs with declarative discourse preceding the interrogative sentence and proverbs that are direct question(s). The paper shows that to fully understand the functions of Yorùbá interrogative proverbs; there is need to take cognizance of the semantic and contextual features of the proverbs. On the basis of this, the study shows that interrogative proverbs in Yorùbá are not used to seek information, rather, they are used rhetorically to express an assertion, doubt, affirmation, creation of comic effect and to provoke people to think about what the obvious answer to the question(s) in the proverbs must be.

Keywords: Proverbs, Yorùbá, Interrogative, Illocutionary force, Rhetoric

Introduction

Proverb is known to be a complex element that does not lend itself to a facile definition. This explains why it has been variously defined by scholars. Délàṅò (1973:77) defines proverbs as ‘self evident truths’ that are communicated in a brief and condensed form. Noah (1996:95) notes that proverb is ‘a laconic declaration, generally invariable in its structure, whose intervention in a context of verbal representation condenses and radiates experiences, ideas and admonitions through its terse, pithy statement of a truism’. Šótúndé (2009) defines proverb as a short familiar sentence expressing a supposed truth or moral lesson which often requires an explanation beyond the literal meaning of the words used. Louis (2000:117) asserts that proverbs are ‘a kind of linguistic instrument, a rhetorical device by which people attempt to get other members of their culture and society to see the world

and behave in a common way.’ Meider (1985:117) defines proverb as a phrase, saying, sentence, statement or experience of the folk which contains wisdom, morals, lessons and advice concerning life which have been handed down from generation to generation. In most cases, the origin of a proverb is unknown. The effectiveness of a proverb lies in its brevity and directness, Crystal (2003:184). Proverbs are the products of human observation about what happens in their environment. Proverbs could be deductive, speculative, affirmative, empirical mythical and superstitious.

The term ‘Yorùbá’ is considered to be the association of several subgroups bound to one another by language and tradition, Igue (1973:9). The name ‘Yorùbá’ is applied to the language of the people. The language belongs to the West Benue – Congo family of the Niger-Congo phylum (Williamson and Blench 2000:31). Yorùbá occupies a large area in the south-western part of Nigeria extending through Lagos, Ògùn, Òyó, Òsun, Òndó, Èkìtì, Kwara, Kogí and Èdó States. Yorùbá can also be found in the republics of Benin, Togo and also in Brazil, Cuba, Sierra-leone and Trinidad and Tobago. The Yorùbá in Nigeria regards the Yorùbá outside the country as ‘Diaspora Yorùbá’. The spread of Yorùbá in Diaspora is extremely thin. The proverbs we used in this study are collected from the Yorùbá in Nigeria.

Yorùbá proverbs are conceived as the ‘horse of word which can carry one swiftly to the idea sought’, Délànò (1973:77). Afọláyán (2005:176) also notes that Yorùbá proverbs are vehicles of ‘expression, evocation and provocation’. This is why the Yorùbá people regard the accurate use of proverbs in the society as a sign of wisdom. In Yorùbá society, proverb occur in almost every discourse and its meaning cannot be known solely on the basis of the aggregate meaning of the words that constitute each of them but the context in which it is used. This is the reason Yorùbá proverbs are called vehicles of cultural values. The idea behind Yorùbá proverbs is to drive home a crucial point in as few words as possible. This explains why the syntax is simple, the images vivid and the allusions domestic, and thus, most times easy to understand. Yorùbá proverbs present ideas in picturesque and more challenging way than ordinary speech could have done. Information contained in some of these proverbs could be quite reliable especially where such relates to particular events, places and personalities as rightly observed by Badà (1970). Factors influencing the incidence of Yorùbá proverb usage in the society include age, occupation and gender.

Several scholars have worked on Yorùbá proverbs. These include Vidal (1852), Ajíbólá (1947), Beier (1959), Šóbándé (1967), Ògúnbòwálé (1970), Oládàpò (2008), Owómóyèlá (1981), Olátúnjì (1984), Aréjẹ (1985), Àlàbá (1986), Akílàde (1987), Délànò

(1987), Sheba (2000), Bello-Olówóòkéré (2004), Àjàní (2004), Ọmọlòşó (2008) and Adéyemí 2010. Vidal (1852) discusses the features of parallelism in Yorùbá proverbs. He compares them to Hebrew poetry. Ajíbólá (1947) and Ògùnbòwálé (1970:135-146) are compilation of some proverbs, their meanings and usage. Beier (Beier and Gbàdàmóşí(1959)) examines the ideas contained in the proverbs as reflecting the Yorùbá world-view. Şóbándé (1967) classifies Yorùbá proverbs into eleven categories. Owómóyèlá (1981) is an exploration of an African Philosophy of social communication as contained in Yorùbá proverbs. Olátúnjí (1984) examines sociological background of Yorùbá proverbs. He also discusses the features of Yorùbá proverbs. He asserts that Yorùbá proverbs state what should or should not be done in the society. In other words, Yorùbá proverbs serve as social charters condemning some practices while recommending others. Àlàbá (1986) examines the forms of the contemporary Yorùbá proverbs vis-à-vis the old ones. Délàno (1987) observes that Yorùbá proverbs may be a source of historical information while Sheba (2000) examines the concept of women in Yorùbá proverbs. Abíòdún (2000) explains why the young people acknowledge the old people when they use proverbs. Adéyemí (2010) examines the socio-cultural perception of disability and the disabled people in the Yorùbá society through selected proverbs. Ọmọlòşó (2008) attempted to classify Yorùbá proverbs into direct and indirect illocutionary acts/forces. In doing so, he relied on the syntactic structures, sentence functions and the context in which they were used. Types of Yorùbá proverbs that were identified include moral (conduct), religious, self-explanatory, plain statement of fact, warning, feminist, sexual or obscene. Also, Ọmọlòşó (2008) recognized Yorùbá interrogative proverbs. However, his work on it is scanty, probably because the work did not major solely on Yorùbá interrogative proverbs. Despite this, the work arouses our curiosity, thus, we decide to investigate Yorùbá interrogative proverbs in order to do in-depth analysis on it.

The focus of this paper therefore is to examine the structures and function(s) of Yorùbá interrogative proverbs. By interrogative proverbs, we mean proverbs that have interrogative sentence(s). To the Yorùbá people, proverb is the horse on which the word rides, the word is the horse on which the proverbs ride. When one is lost for words, proverb is used to seek and search for the right utterance, Adéyemí (2010:104-15). If this assertion is right, why then, do the Yorùbá people sometimes employ interrogative proverbs in communication? This study is set to unravel this puzzle.

This paper is divided into four sections. Section one, which introduces the study, looks at the definition of proverbs and the review of some earlier works on Yorùbá proverbs. In section two, we examine the meaning of interrogative sentences while section three gives a description of the forms and function(s) of Yorùbá interrogative proverbs. Section four is the conclusion.

Yorùbá Interrogative Sentences

Interrogative sentences are sentences employed as questions. Awóbùlúyì (1978:123). Such sentences with an interrogating structure convey that there is a certain amount of information which the speaker does not have and which he is trying to make the interlocutor to supply, Haegeman (2006:21). This implies that questions are statements/sentences which seek information and for which a correct reply is expected. Radford (1988:462) believe that question in natural languages can be classified into a number of types. May be that is why Crystal (2003:218) says questions fall into three main types depending on the kind of reply one expects, and on how such questions are constructed. These types are: Yes-No questions (polar questions), Wh-questions (content word questions) and alternative questions. Yes-no questions allow an affirmative or negative response. Wh-questions begin with question words and allow a reply from wide range of possibilities while alternative questions require a reply which relates to options in the interrogative sentence.

The terms ‘question’ and interrogative’ are often interchanges, Matthews (2007:200). However, a distinction can sometimes be made. Thus, ‘can’t he shut up?’ has the structure of an interrogative, its function would not be a question but a request or command. Questions are used by people in all walks of life to learn about their world and find information to guide their lives. Questions also confront people with a challenge. Apart from eliciting information, questions are used for a number of purposes. These include provoking people to share ideas they have, lead people to consider new ideas, challenge beliefs and guide reconsideration of values and developing the process of thinking that may guide decision making, Kissock and Iyortsuun (1982:6).

Formation of Interrogative Sentences in Yorùbá

Unlike the English Language where in most cases, the interrogative pattern of the declarative sentences is formed by changing the position of the auxiliary with respect to that of the subject (subject-auxiliary inversion-moving the auxiliary leftward across the subject). For example:

Declarative: ‘The murderer has broken the window’

Interrogative: ‘Has the murderer broken the window?’

The interrogative sentence derivation in Yorùbá does not involve the movement of its auxiliary. There are two types of interrogative constructions in Yorùbá. One, those that contain question words and two, those without question words. Interrogative constructions that contain question words are of two basic kinds. These are yes/no (polar) and content word (wh) interrogative constructions. Polar questions in Yorùbá are derived by adjoining either of two question head elements, **ńjẹ** or **şé** to the beginning of declarative sentences, as exemplified below.

Declarative: 1. Bísí wá ‘Bísí came.’

Interrogative

2. (a) **Şé** Bísí wá ‘Did Bísí come?’

(b) **Ñjẹ** Bísí wá ‘Did Bísí come?’

Unlike **ńjẹ/şé**, **bí** is a polar element that regularly occurs sentence final in Yorùbá polar questions as in:

3. Bísí wá **bí**? ‘Did Bísí come?’

bí makes the question in which it appears more emphatic. In some constructions, **ńjẹ** can co-occur with **bí** but **şé** cannot as shown below:

4. **Ñjẹ** Bísí lọ **bí**? ‘Did Bísí go?’

Yes/no questions in (2-4) above allow a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer.

The process of forming content word questions in Yorùbá involves movement. Content word questions in the language are nominal expressions which are often moved sentence initially where they are immediately followed by the focus marker **ni**, Ìlòrí (2010:256). Yorùbá content word questions are **ta** ‘who’, **isí** ‘what’, **èwo/wo** ‘which’, **ìbo** ‘where’, **báwo** ‘which’, **èlò** ‘how much’, **mélòó** ‘how many’, **nítórí kí...** ‘why’. This is illustrated in the following examples.

5.

- | | | | | |
|-----|---------------------------|---|--|-------------------------------|
| (a) | Délé rí Ta (ni) ní ojà | → | Ta_i ni Délé rí... _i ní ojà? | ‘Délé saw who in the market?’ |
| (b) | Délé rí Olú ní ìbo | → | Ibo_i ni Délé ti rí Olú... _i ? | ‘Délé saw Olú where?’ |
| (d) | O gbọ kí (ni) | → | Kí_i ni o gbọ... _i ? | ‘What did you hear?’ |
| (e) | Wón ta mélòó | → | Mélòó_i ni wón tà... | ‘They bought how many?’ |

- (f) O máa dé **nígbà wo** → **Nígbà wo_i** ni o máa dé... ‘When you are coming’
- (g) E fẹ̀ **èwo** níbẹ̀ → **Èwo_i** ni ẹ̀ fẹ̀.... níbẹ̀_i ‘Which one do you want out of them’
- (h) Ìyẹn jẹ̀ **èlò** → **Èlò_i** ni ìyẹn jẹ̀...._i?’ ‘How much is that?’

These content word questions demand phrasal or clausal answers. There are other types of content word question constructions which do not involve wh-items. Examples of such question expressions are:

6.

- (a) Aṣọ mi **dà?** ‘where is my cloth’
- (b) Aṣọ mi **ńkọ?** ‘where is my cloth’

dà and **ńkọ** are content word questions that occur at the sentence final only.

The interrogative ‘constructions without question words in Yorùbá are pronounced specially, Awóbùlúyì (1978:124). The voice is lighter and higher for such constructions than their declarative versions. The eyebrows are raised in the process.

The Structures of Yorùbá Interrogative Proverbs

In this section, we shall examine the structures of Yorùbá Interrogative Proverbs. Bámgbóṣé (1969:75-76) classifies Yorùbá proverbs structurally into four different types, namely, simple, complex, sequential and parallel. Also, Ọmọlòṣọ (2008) uses some of Bámgbóṣé’s syntactic criteria to classify Yorùbá proverbs as simple and complex proverbs. He submits that Yorùbá proverbs can be declarative (either positive or negative), or interrogative. Structurally, Ọmọlòṣọ classifies Yorùbá interrogative proverbs into three, namely, (a) direct interrogative proverbs or those that begin with questions tags like **báwo** ‘how’, **kí** ‘what’; (b) interrogative proverbs that begin with **bí** ‘if’ and end with **kí** ‘what’ and (c) declarative proverbs produced on high pitch to indicate they are questions. He exemplified (a) - (c) above with only three proverbs. The proverbs are:

7.

- (a) **Kí** ni eegun n wò tí kò fòwúrò jó?
‘What commitment does a masquerade have that it cannot dance in the morning.’
- (b) *Bí ọmọdé láṣọ tí, **ṣé** ó lè ní àkísà tó àgbà?
‘If a youth has many clothes as an elder, can he have as many rags as elder has?’

(c) *Ebi kì í pani tí tí kí a fi igi òrùlé dáná..?

‘Does one because one is hungry (sic) use the rafter of one’s house as fire wood?’

We asterisked (7 b and c) above because they are judged unacceptable in the language. Example (7b) is not tenable because no interrogative sentence begins with **bí** ‘if’, a conditional clause marker in the language. The interrogative sentence in (7b) begins with **şé**. However, the traditional way to render (7b) is *Bí ọmọdé bá láşọ bí àgbà, kò lè ní àkísà tó o*. ‘If a young person has more suits/clothes as an elder, he cannot have as many rags as the elder.’ Therefore, example (7b) is not an interrogative proverb as Ọmọlòşó (2008) make us to believe. We want to say here, that virtually, all Yorùbá declarative sentences can be turned into interrogative sentences by adjoining the polar question marker(s) if there is ulterior motive by the speaker. As we shall see later, no Yorùbá interrogative proverb begins with polar question markers. The proverb in (7c) is in negative declarative sentence whose basic role is in asserting that something is not the case. There is no way (7c) or any proverb of its kind can be produced on high pitch to indicate that it is a question in Yorùbá as claimed in Ọmọlòşó (2008).

The implication of our comments above is that, there is a need to examine the forms of Yorùbá interrogativeproverbs in order to get a good perspective of it. Our position in this paper shows that Yorùbá interrogative proverbs have two basic forms:

(a) proverbs with declarative discourse preceding the interrogative sentence and (b) proverbs that are direct questions.

One basic structure that is peculiar to almost all the Yorùbá interrogative proverbs is that there is always a declarative sentence preceding the interrogative sentence in each proverb. Such an interrogative sentence is dependent on the subject matter contained in the discourse of the preceding declarative sentence as shown in the following proverbs.

8. Baba jóná ò ní bèrèrè irùngbòn, **kí** ló fa sàbàbí?

‘A man is burnt to death and you enquire about his beard, which part of him caught fire first?’

9. Èèyàn ní òun yóò bà ọ jẹ, o ní kò tó bèẹ. Bó ba ní o kò nu ìdí, ẹnì **mélòó** lo fẹ fẹdí hàn?

‘A man says he will blackmail you and you say he cannot. If he says you do not clean your anus, to how many people will you show your bottom to disprove him?’

10. Ajá tí ó gbé iyò, **kí** ni yóò fi ẹ?

‘The dog which stole salt, what is it going to do with it?’
11. Àpón dọjà, ó ní ọjà ò kún; ìyàwó tirẹ **mélòó** ló wà níbẹ?

‘How dare the bachelor complain that only a few people patronize the market; how many wives has he there?’
12. Bí a bá fogún ọdún pilẹ were, **ìgbà** wo la fẹ fi bugi jẹ?

‘If it takes two decades to go crackers, how long would it take to be at the maddest?’
13. Èbìtì tó pa Owólàńkẹ kò jẹbi, **kí** ni eegún fẹ fi ẹyìn ẹ?

‘The trap that kills Owólàńkẹ is not to blame, what could an *egúngún* masquerade be doing under the palm-fruit trap?’

However, there are other few Yorùbá interrogative proverbs that are independent or direct questions without any declarative discourse preceding it. Such include:
14. **Kí** ní eégún n wò tí kò fi òwúrò jó?

‘What commitment does a masquerade have that it cannot dance in the morning?’
15. **Ta** ni a gbé gẹşin tí kò ní ẹ ipàkó lùkẹ?

‘Is there anyone put on a horse back who will not raise his head backward?’
16. **Kí** ni ológiní n wá tí ó fi jóná mólé?

‘What was the cat looking for before it was burnt up with the house?’
17. **Kí** ni ẹnìkan gbé karí tí ènìyàn mẹfà kò lè sò kalẹ?

‘What could a single person be carrying that six others could not lift?’
18. **Kí** ni ọmọ ẹyẹ fẹ ẹ fún ìyá rẹ ju kó dàgbà kó fò lọ?

‘The fledgling is of no use to its mother, it flies off as soon as its wings can carry it.’
19. **Mélòó** ni ọkánjúà máa lá nínú àpò iyò?

‘How much could the greedy possibly lick of a bag of salt?’
20. Oore **kí** ni ìpá ẹ fún ìdí?

‘Of what benefit is the enlarged scrotum to its victim?’
21. **Ta** ni yóò sọ pé Lébe ò pọnmọ re?

‘Anyone dare confront Lébe, the masquerade over his behaviour?’

Irrespective of their structures as shown in (8-21) above, most of the interrogative proverbs contain question words while few do not. Yorùbá interrogative proverbs that contain question words are called after the English spelling of the marker of questions which sport WH-words. Such question words always occur at the beginning of most of the interrogative sentences as shown in the following examples.

22. Bí kò sí àkópò, **kí** ni ewúré n wá ní isò eyelé?
‘Without their being mixed together, how can you find a goat in the stall for pigeon?’
23. **Ta** ni ó fi ọ̀bẹ̀ tó nù jẹ isu?
‘Who will confess that it was he who had used a knife before it got lost.’
‘A knife before it got lost.’
24. Olè tó gbé kàkàkì ọ̀ba, **níbo** ni yóò ti fọ̀n?
‘The thief who steals the King’s bugle, where is he going to blow it?’
25. A kò fẹ ọ̀ nílúú, ò n dá orin, bí o bá dá orin tán, **ta** ni yóò gbè é?
‘You are rejected in the town, yet you want to raise a song, if you raise it, who will join you to sing the chorus?’

However, there are other few interrogative proverbs where the question words occur at the end of the interrogative sentences as exemplified below.

26. Èni se ọ̀bẹ̀ àṣán, a ní kí òrìṣà pá a, ẹ̀ni tí kò ẹ̀ rará **ńkọ́**?
‘The gods is asked to kill a man who prepared soup without meat, what of the man who prepared nothing?’
27. Abomilámù réégún, ẹ̀ni tó lọ pón lódò **ńkọ́**?
‘If the masquerade scares off those scooping water from the water-pot, what could possibly be the fate of those who fetched it from the brook?’
28. Bí ọ̀lókùnrun kì í bá jẹ adiyẹ, ẹ̀ni tó n wa itàkùn **ńkọ́**?
‘If chicken is forbidden to the sick man, what of those taking care of him?’
29. Wọ̀n ni kí ohun tó wu ni wá, ohun tó dára bó síbẹ̀, bó bá dára tí ò bá wu ni **ńkọ́**?
‘The call is for something admirable but something interesting surfaces, what if it is not admirable.’

The question word in (26-29) above is **ńkọ́** “what”. The few Yorùbá interrogative proverbs that do not have question words include the following:

30. O kò sá igi lógbẹ̀, o kò ta ògùrò lófà, o gbé ẹ̀nu sókè nídìí ọ̀pẹ̀, ọ̀fẹ̀ níí ro?
‘You neither slit the back of a palm-tree, nor pierce the trunk of a date-palm, yet you expect to drink palm-wine, does the juice come freely without labour?’
31. O rí ogbó adiyẹ lójà, o sàré rà á, ìbá máa yé ogún, kí ó máa pa ogún, wọ̀n a gbe wá sọjà wá tà?
‘You saw an old hen in the market, you quickly bought it, if it had been productive would it have been brought to the market for sale?’

32. Wíwó epo tàbí àìrówó rà á?

‘Is palm oil so scarce or is it beyond our means?’

The interrogative sentence in these types of proverbs is pronounced specially with higher and lighter voice.

The Functions of Yorùbá Interrogative Proverbs

To fully study the functions of Yorùbá interrogative proverbs, there is a need to take cognizance of the semantic and contextual features of the proverbs. Yorùbá proverbs are made of words. These words are constituted into a system called sentence. The meaning of a sentence depends on the meaning of the component words and how they are syntactically combined. When a sentence/utterance is produced by a speaker, he has just specified the bare outlines of the meaning he intends to convey, leaving the interlocutor to reconstruct the details in their full richness to get his intentions. This is called speech/illocutionary acts- the actions speakers perform in uttering sentences, including informing, promising, requesting, questioning, commanding, warning, preaching, congratulating, laying bets, swearing and exclaiming, Mc Gregor (2009:142). The type of action performed by the speaker in making an utterance is called its illocutionary force- the force that an expression of some specific form will have when it is uttered, Matthews (2007:184) or what the speaker’s utterance suggest the speaker is doing. However, some utterances do not always wear their illocutionary force on their sleeve. Also, in some cases, there are typical associations between certain syntactic forms of sentences and a particular illocutionary force. For example, the interrogative sentence: ‘Can you pass the book to me?’ has a typical illocutionary force of a question which would normally attract a response like ‘yes’ or ‘no’. Such an answer may be inadequate or inappropriate because the illocutionary force of the question as it has been used here is a ‘command or request’. In a situation like this where an illocutionary force other than the typically associated to a syntactic form is given, they are called indirect speech acts and when the association is the typical illocutionary force, we speak of direct speech acts.

In classifying Yorùbá proverbs into illocutionary acts, Ọmọlòşó (2008) applies some of Allan’s (1986) criteria for classifying into direct or indirect speech acts. Ọmọlòşó opines that direct illocutionary acts of Yorùbá proverbs refer to what the speaker is doing overtly by uttering the proverb. Likewise, he notes that in an indirect illocutionary act, the speaker communicates more to the listener than he verbally expresses and for the understanding of what he says, the speaker relies on the shared background information between himself and the interlocutor. On this basis, Ọmọlòşó posits that Yorùbá interrogative proverbs appear to

be particularly marked for indirect illocutionary forces like complaining, blaming, protesting, ordering and requesting. While we agree that Yorùbá interrogative proverbs can be classified under indirect illocutionary acts, we differ in certain respects concerning the illocutionary force, for obvious reasons. We do not agree that Yorùbá interrogative proverbs have the illocutionary forces Ọmọlòṣọ mentioned in his work. First, the three proverbs in (7) which he uses are grossly inadequate to substantiate his claims. There is a need to buttress his claim with more explanations, but he did not. Second, it is important to know why the Yorùbá people do have interrogative proverbs in the first instance.

In our study of the syntactic structures of Yorùbá interrogative proverbs, we observe that none of the interrogative sentences in the proverbs have polar question head elements, **ńjẹ/ṣé** beginning them. Majority of the proverbs have content word questions as shown in examples (8-32) above. As we have noted previously, the content word questions demand phrasal or clausal answers. However, this is not so with Yorùbá interrogative proverbs. Thus, the question in each Yorùbá interrogative proverbs has important rhetorical dimensions. The question is asked for a purpose other than to obtain information. Consider the following:

33. (a) A bímọ kò gbọ́n, a ní kí ó má kù ú, **kí** ló ń pa èyàn bí àìgbọ́n?

‘Someone’s concern is that his foolish child should not die, but what greater cause of death is there than foolishness?’

(b) Kí ni aparí wá dé ìsọ onígabajúmọ?

‘What does a bald-headed man want in a barbing saloon?’

The rhetorical questions in (33a and b) above are asked to encourage the interlocutor to think about what the obvious answer to the questions must be and not for seeking information. A rhetorical question is a question type posed for its persuasive effect without seeking information or expecting a reply.

Now that we have pointed out that the questions in Yorùbá interrogative proverbs are rhetorical, the speaker has different illocutionary force when these interrogative proverbs are uttered. For example, some of the proverbs are used by the speaker for assertion. Consider (34) below:

34. (a) Ajogun Ifá ní kí òun má kù ú, ẹni tẹ Ifá **ńkọ**?

‘Someone who inherit Ifá oracle prays that he may not die, but where is the original owner?’

(b) O fi awọ ẹkùn ẹ oògùn àìkú, ẹkùn ìbá máa ku, iwọ a rí awọ rẹ ẹ oògùn?

‘You used the foreskin of the leopard to make a charm that will prevent you from dying. If the leopard had not died, how would you have been able to get its skin to make charm.’

- (c) Mákùú ò mawo, ó n bá wọn bópa; Mákùú ò mòwè, ó n bá wọn mòòkùn lódò, ìgbà wo ni Mákùú ò ní kú?

‘**Máàkù** is uninitiated but he dabbles in the occult; he cannot swim yet dives into a river. How long could he survive such escapades?’

The three proverbs in (34) above are used by the speaker to assert that death is inevitable. The questions in the proverbs assert that the truth of the (preceding) statement is obvious. Also, Yorùbá interrogative proverbs may be used for pure comic effect as shown in:

35. (a) Wọn ní kí arúgbó gba ọmọ pòn, ó ní ‘sébí wọn mò pé òun kò lẹyín. Wọn ní kí o pa ọmọ jẹ ni?’.

‘The old woman was asked to help carry the child on her back. She replied “but you know that I am toothless”. Did they ask her to eat up (kill) the child?’

- (b) Ọkunrin n fí ọwọ kan tú sòkòtò, ó n fí ọwọ kejì téní. Obìnrin ní ‘kò rí toun mú gbọ.’ Bí ó bá fẹ rí tiẹ mú gbọ **ńkọ**?’

‘A man is loosing his loins with a hand and preparing the bed with the other and the woman is complaining that she is not being attended to. What else will the man do if she is to be attended to.’

The proverbs in (35) above are used humorously to amuse the listener.

It is also common to use some of the questions in interrogative proverbs for affirmation where the certainty or obviousness of a statement is expressed as shown below in (36):

- (36) Ọba n pe ọ, O ní ò n mu gaàrí lówó, **ta** ló ni ọ? **Ta** ló lomi tí ò fí n mu gaàrí?

‘The King wants you, but you say you are eating gaàrí. Who owns you and owns the water with which you are eating gaàrí?’

The speaker uses the question in (36) above to affirm the truth that no one questions the authority of the king in Yorùbá land. The king owns the land and everything on it.

Another common illocutionary force of rhetorical questions in Yorùbá interrogative proverbs is the expression of doubt. Consider (37) below.

37. a. **Ta** ni fi ọbẹ tó nù jẹ iṣu?

‘Who will confess that it was he who had used a knife before it got lost?’

- b. Ejọ tó o rò tíí láàárò tó ò jàre, **báwo** lo ẹ fẹ rò ó lálẹ tó ó jàre?

‘A case you could not win with your pleadings in the morning, how do you hope to win it in the evening?’

From the foregoing, we have been able to show that the question at the end of the Yorùbá interrogative proverbs is rhetorical with illocutionary force like assertion, affirmation, expression of doubt, and creation of comic effect.

Conclusion

This study has been concerned with the re-examination of the structure and functions of Yorùbá interrogative proverbs. In the course of this, Yorùbá interrogative sentences and the structures of Yorùbá proverbs are described, and the functions of the proverbs are discussed. It has been shown that the Yorùbá interrogative proverbs have two basic forms which can either be a direct question or declarative discourse preceding an interrogative sentence. The study also shows that these proverbs are rhetorical in nature with illocutionary force like creation of comic effect, expression of doubt, assertion and affirmation.

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